

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SJM 8004

---

---

**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Agriculture & Ecology

**Brief Description:** Petitioning Congress to appropriate support for an oil spill prevention tugboat in the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

**Sponsors:** By Senators Spanel, Swecker, Patterson, Hargrove, Costa, Eide, Fraser, Thibaudeau, Franklin, Regala, Gardner, Prentice, Kline, Kohl-Welles and Haugen.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Agriculture & Ecology: 3/22/01, 3/29/01 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Petitions the United States Congress to appropriate funds to support a permanently stationed oil spill prevention tugboat in the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

---

### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & ECOLOGY

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives G. Chandler, Republican Co-Chair; Linville, Democratic Co-Chair; Cooper, Democratic Vice Chair; Mielke, Republican Vice Chair; B. Chandler, Delvin, Dunshee, Grant, Hunt, Kirby, Quall, Roach, Schoesler and Sump.

**Staff:** Jason Callahan (786-7117).

**Background:**

The 2000 supplemental budget appropriated \$1.65 million to the Department of Ecology (DOE) to fund an oil spill prevention rescue tugboat in the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The tug *Barbara Foss* was commissioned and began duty at Neah Bay on September 18, 2000. It is scheduled to remain on site throughout the winter storm season. The Neah Bay rescue tug has been called eight times over the current and last two winter seasons, actively towing or escorting five vessels.

The North Puget Sound Long-Term Oil Spill Risk Management Panel, which met monthly from September 1999 to July 2000 to develop an oil spill risk management plan,

considered the costs and benefits of a permanently stationed, federally funded rescue tug at Neah Bay. Three-fourths of the panel members voted in support of the tug; however, it was not included in the final recommendations because panel ground rules required a consensus of the members to endorse a proposal. The tug proposal received four "nay" votes, so it did not pass.

Under the existing situation, the tug will end its duty on May 18, 2001. The annual cost of a permanent rescue tug has been estimated by the DOE to be approximately \$3 million.

---

**Summary of Bill:**

The Washington State Senate and House of Representatives requests the United States Congress to appropriate sufficient funds to support a permanently stationed oil spill prevention tugboat at the westward end of the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

---

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not Requested.

**Testimony For:** Fifteen billion gallons of oil moves through the Strait of Juan de Fuca each year on approximately 7,000 vessel trips. There are no pilots, escorts, or unencumbered tugs west of Port Angeles, yet that area is rich in natural resources. This creates a gap in safety coverage between Port Angeles and the open Pacific. A spill in this area would impact the coastline, wildlife, and the economy of the local tribes. Clallam County alone has over 200 miles of shoreline that is significant to the state of Washington. These shorelines contain four tribal reservations, a national marine sanctuary, and a national park. The topic of oil spills is not an abstract discussion for the residents of this area. The threat is real, and there have been numerous near misses.

Funding for the tug should be a federal issue. There are many federal interests in the Strait and the Coast Guard routinely conducts operations in the area. The federal government has recognized its interest in the area.

**Testimony Against:** The cost of a rescue tug is not justified by the risk present. There are better uses for the funds that would be needed to pay for a rescue tug at Neah Bay, such as an improvement in radar coverage within the Strait of Juan de Fuca and the Puget Sound. If a tug is needed at Neah Bay, it would also be justified in other areas of the Puget Sound.

**Testified:** (In support) Senator Spanel, prime sponsor; Stan Norman, Department of

Ecology; Gordon Smith, Vice-Chair, Makah Tribe; Mike Doherty, Clallam County Board of Commissioners; and Bruce Wishart, People for Puget Sound.

(Opposed) Randy Ray, Puget Sound Steamship Operators.